1 JOHN 2:28-3:24

PARAGRAPH DIVISIONS OF MODERN TRANSLATIONS

UBS[4]	NKJV	NRSV	TEV	NJB
Children of God (2:28-3:10)	The Children of God	Loyalty to the True Faith (2:18-29)	The enemy of Christ (2:18-29)	To Live as God's Children (2:29-4:6)
2:28-3:3	2:28-3:3	2:28	2:28-29	
		2:29 Filial Relation Expressed in Right Conduct	Children of God	2:29-3:2
		3:1-10	3:1-3	First Condition: To Break with Sin
	Sin and the Child of God			3:3-10
3:4-10	3:4-9		3:4-6	
			3:7-8	
	The Imperative of Love		3:9-10	
Love One Another	3:10-15	Love for One Another	Love One Another	Second Condition: To Keep the Commandments, Especially Life
3:11-18		3:11-18	3:11-12	3:11-24
	The Outworking of Love		3:13-18	
Confidence Before God	3:16-23	The Christian's Assurance	Courage Before God	
3:19-24	The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error	3:19-24	3:19-24	
	3:24-4:6			

READING CYCLE THREE (see "Bible Interpretation Seminar")

FOLLOWING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT AT PARAGRAPH LEVEL

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

Read the chapter in one sitting. Identify the subjects (reading cycle #3). Compare your subject divisions with the five translations above. Paragraphing is not inspired, but it is the key to following the original author's intent, which is the heart of interpretation. Every paragraph has one and only one subject.

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS

A. 1 John 2 is directed at the Gnostic false teachers (especially Docetic Gnostics who denied Jesus' humanity).

B. 1 John 3 continues to allude to the false teachers who separated salvation (justification) from ethics and morality (sanctification). Yet chapter 3 also addresses the believer more directly.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 2:28-3:3

[28]Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming. [29]If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him. [3:1]See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. [2]Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. [3]And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

2:28 There is much discussion among commentators whether a new paragraph should begin in 1 John 2:28, 29, or 3:1. Because of the repetition between 1 John 3:27 and 28, the paragraph division should probably go here.

▣ **"little children"** See note at 1 John 2:1.

▣ **"abide in Him"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE. This is the third PRESENT IMPERATIVE used to promote Christian perseverance (cf. 1 John 3:15,24).

The PRONOUNS' ANTECEDENTS are often difficult to identify, but in this paragraph, they are obvious.

1. "in Him," 1 John 3:28a – Jesus
2. "from Him," 1 John 3:28b – Jesus
3. "His," 1 John 3:28b – Jesus
4. "He is righteous," 1 John 3:29 – the Father
5. "born of Him," 1 John 3:29 – the Father (see note)
6. "know Him," 1 John 3:1 – the Father (cf. John 15:21; 16:2-3)
7. "He appears," 1 John 3:2 – Jesus
8. "like Him," 1 John 3:2 – Jesus
9. "see Him," 1 John 3:2 – Jesus
10. "He is," 1 John 3:2 – Jesus

11. "on Him," 1 John 3:3 – Jesus
12. "as He is pure," 1 John 3:3 – Jesus

Context, context, context!

SPECIAL TOPIC: NEED TO PERSEVERE

SPECIAL TOPIC: "ABIDING" IN JOHN'S WRITINGS

▣ **"when He appears"** This is a THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE, like 1 John 3:29, and also the "whenever Jesus returns" of 1 John 3:2. This is not meant to convey an uncertain event, but an uncertain time (similar to the NT use of the term "hope," cf. 1 John 3:3).

SPECIAL TOPIC: HOPE

▣ **"we may have confidence"** The Greek word for "confidence" (*parrhēsia*) is from the root "to speak freely." Assurance is a current lifestyle based on the believer's knowledge of and trust in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOLDNESS (*parrhēsia*)

NASB	**"and not shrink away from Him in shame"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"and not be ashamed before Him"**
NRSV	**"and be put to shame before him"**
TEV	**"and not hide in shame from him"**
NJB	**"and not shrink from him in shame"**
REB	**"and unashamed before him"**

This is an AORIST PASSIVE (deponent) SUBJUNCTIVE which means that it can be understood as

1. the believer himself being ashamed (NASB, TEV, NJB)
2. the believer being made ashamed (NRSV)

Believers are to look for and rejoice in the return of Christ, but those who have lived in selfish, worldly ways will surely be surprised and embarrassed at His appearance! There will be a judgment of believers (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10), not for sin but for the non-use or misuse of their spiritual giftedness.

▣ **"at His coming"** This is a reference to the Second Coming. This word, *Parousia*, is used only here in all of John's writings and has the connotation of an imminent royal visit.

This is literally "until the *Parousia,*" which means "presence" and was used of a royal visit. The other NT terms used for the Second Coming are

1. *epiphaneia,* "face to face appearing"
2. *apokalupis*, "unveiling"
3. "the Day of the Lord" and the variations of this phrase

SPECIAL TOPIC: NT TERMS FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

2:29 "If" This is a THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE that means potential action. Here it refers to an assumed knowledge that believers share, but false teachers have missed.

▣ **"you know"** In grammatical form this is either a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE which states an ongoing knowledge, or a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE which speaks of a believer's necessary knowledge. John's usage of "know" as the possession of all who have the Spirit dictates that it is INDICATIVE.

▣ **"He"** This refers to Jesus (cf. 1 John 2:1,28; 3:7. However, the last PRONOUN, "born of Him," seems to refer to God the Father because the phrase "born of God" is used so often (cf. 1 John 3:9;

4:7; 5:1,4,18; John 1:13). See full note at 1 John 2:28.

▣ **"righteous. . .righteousness"** This is an expected family characteristic!

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

▣ **"born"** This is a PERFECT PASSIVE INDICATIVE which means a settled condition brought about by an outside agent, God the Father (cf. John 3:3). Notice the use of more familial imagery (cf. 1 John 3:9) to describe Christianity (it is a family). See note at 1 John 3:1d.

3:1 "See how great a love" The word for "love" used here and throughout 1 John are *agapaō* (VERB) or *agapē* (NOUN, cf. 1 John 2:5,15; 3:1,16,17; 4:7,8,9,10,12,16,17,18; 5:3). This term was used in Classical Greek, but not often. It seems that the early church redefined it in light of the gospel. It came to represent a deep abiding love. It is used synonymously with *phileō* (cf. John 5:20; 11:3,36; 12:25; 15:19; 16:27; 20:2; 21:15,16,17). However, it is interesting that it is always used (in 1 John) in connection with believers loving believers. Faith and fellowship with Jesus changes our relationship with both God and mankind!

▣ **"the Father has bestowed on us"** This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. The use of this TENSE connected to God's gift of salvation in Christ is one biblical basis for the doctrine of the security of the believer (cf. John 6:35-40; 10:1ff; Eph. 2:5,8; 5:1).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE

SPECIAL TOPIC: NT EVIDENCE FOR ONE'S SALVATION

▣ **"that we would be called"** This is an AORIST PASSIVE SUBJUNCTIVE which is used in the sense of an honorific title ("children of God") given by God.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CALLED

▣ **"children of God"** This is the focus of 1 John 2:29-3:10. It confirms God's initiative in our salvation (cf. John 6:44,65). John uses familial terms to describe the believer's new relationship with deity (cf. 1 John 2:29; 3:1,2,9,10; John 1:12).

It is interesting that John (cf. John 3:3) and Peter (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3,23) use the familial imagery "born again" or "born from above," while Paul uses the familial imagery of "adoption" (cf. Rom. 8:15,23; 9:4; Gal. 4:1-5; Eph. 1:5) and James uses the familial imagery of "birth" (cf. James 1:18) or "bringing forth" to describe the believer's new relationship with God through Christ. Christianity is a family. Believers are not part of it by creation but by a new birth.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHILDREN OF GOD

▣ **"and *such* we are"** This is the PRESENT INDICATIVE. This phrase is not found in the King James Version of the Bible because it was not included in the later Greek manuscripts (i.e., K and L) on which the KJV is based. However, this phrase does appear in several of the most ancient Greek manuscripts (P^{47}, א, A, B, and C). The UBS^4 gives its inclusion an "A" rating (certain).

SPECIAL TOPIC: TEXTUAL CRITICISM

▣ **"the world does not know us"** The term "world" is used in a theologically similar way as 1 John 2:15-17. The world denotes human society organized and functioning apart from God (cf. John 15:18-19; 17:14-15). Persecution and rejection by the world is another evidence of our position in Christ (cf. Matt. 5:10-16; Rom. 8:17; 1 Pet. 4:12-16).

▣ **"because it did not know Him"** This is apparently a reference to God the Father because in the Gospel of John Jesus says again and again that the world does not know Him (cf. John 8:19,55; 15:18,21; 16:3). The PRONOUNS in 1 John are ambiguous (see note at 1 John 2:28). In this context the grammatical antecedent is the Father, but the theological reference in 1 John 3:2 is the Son. However, in John this may be purposeful ambiguity because to see Jesus is to see the Father (cf. John 12:45; 14:9).

SPECIAL TOPIC: KNOW

3:2 "it has not appeared as yet what we will be" This speaks of John's inability to describe these end-time events (cf. Acts 1:7) or the exact nature of the resurrected body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-49). This also shows that 1 John 2:27 does not mean exhaustive knowledge in every area. Even Jesus' knowledge of this event was limited while He was incarnate (cf. Matt. 24:36; Mark 13:22).

▣ **"when He appears"** The term "when" introduces a THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE. It is used here not to question the Second Coming, but to express its uncertain date. John, although emphasizing a full salvation now, also expects a Second Coming.

▣ **"we will be like Him"** This involves the consummation of our Christlikeness (cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:21; and Col. 3:4). This is often called "glorification" (cf. Rom. 8:28-30). This is the culmination of our salvation! This eschatological transformation is related to the full restoration of God's image in humans created in His likeness (cf. Gen. 1:26; 5:1,3; 9:6). Intimate fellowship with God is again possible!

SPECIAL TOPIC: GREEK VERB TERMS USED FOR SALVATION

▣ **"because we will see Him just as He is"** Job longed to see God (cf. Job 19:25-27). Jesus told us that the pure in heart will see God (cf. Matt. 5:8). To see Him in His fullness means that we will be changed into His likeness (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12). This refers to the glorification of the believer (cf. Rom. 8:29) at the Second Coming. If "justification" means freedom from the penalty of sin and "sanctification" means freedom from the power of sin, then "glorification" means freedom from the presence of sin!

3:3 "everyone" The Greek term *pas* appears seven times from 1 John 2:29 to 3:10. There are no exceptions. John presents truth in stark, black-or-white categories. One is either the child of God or the child of Satan (cf. 1 John 2:29; 3:3,4,6 [twice],9,10).

▣ **"this hope"** In Paul this term often refers to Resurrection Day (cf. Acts 23:6; 24:15; 26:6-7; Rom. 8:20-25; 1 Thess. 2:19; Titus 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:3,21). It expresses the certainty of the event, but with an ambiguous time element.

John does not speak of "the hope" of the Second Coming as frequently as other NT authors. This is the only use of the term in his writings. He focuses on the benefits and obligations of "abiding" in Christ now! However, this is not to imply he did not expect an end-time judgment of evil (cf. Rev. 20:11-15) and end-time glorification of the believer (cf. 1 John 3:1-3).

SPECIAL TOPIC: HOPE

▣ **"purifies himself, just as He is pure"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. Purity is important (cf. Matt. 5:8,48). We must cooperate in the process of sanctification (cf. 2 Cor. 7:1; James 4:8, 1 Pet. 1:22; 2 Pet. 3:13,14; just as John 1:12; 3:16 speak of our cooperation in the process of justification. This same tension between God's part (sovereignty) in our salvation and our part (human free will) can be clearly seen by comparing Ezek. 18:31 with Ezek. 36:26-27. God always takes the initiative (cf. John 6:44,65), but He has demanded that covenant people must

respond by initial repentance and faith as well as continuing repentance, faith, obedience, service, worship, and perseverance.

This may be an allusion to Jesus' High Priestly prayer of John 17, especially 1 John 3:17,19. He sanctifies Himself, His followers sanctify themselves. It is somewhat surprising that different forms of the same basic root are used.

1. John 17:17,19 – *hagiazō* (*hagios*, cf. John 10:36)
2. 1 John 3:3 – *hagnizō* (*hagnos*, cf. John 11:55)

CONTEXTUAL INSIGHTS TO 3:4-10 (interpretation problems caused by 3:6,9)

A. This passage has been the center of the controversy between Christian perfectionism (cf. Romans 6), sometimes called entire sanctification, and the continuing sinning of the Christian (cf. Romans 7; Eph. 6:10-18).

B. We must not allow our theological bias to influence our exegesis of this text. Also, we must not allow other texts to influence this text until our independent study of this text is complete and we have ascertained what John was saying both in 1 John 3 and in the entire book of 1 John!

C. This text clearly presents the goal that all believers long for, a total deliverance from sin. This same ideal is presented in Romans 6. Through Christ's power we have the potential for sinless living.

D. This passage, however, must fit into the larger context of the entire book of 1 John.
   1. To interpret this passage without regard for 1 John 1:8-2:2 (Christians still sin) would be folly.
   2. To interpret this passage in such a manner as to defeat the overall purpose of 1 John, the assurance of salvation against the claims of the false teachers would be folly also.
   3. This passage must be related to the false teachers' claims of sinlessness or sin's insignificance. Possibly 1 John 1:8-2:2 deals with one extreme of the false teachers, while 3:1-10 deals with another. Remember that interpreting the letters of the NT is like listening to one half of a phone conversation.

E. A paradoxical relationship exists between these two passages. Sin in the Christian's life is a recurrent problem in the NT (cf. Romans 7; Eph. 4:14; 6:10-18). This forms the same dialectical tension as predestination and free will or security and perseverance. The paradox provides a theological balance and attacks the extreme positions. The false teachers were presenting two errors in the area of sin.
SPECIAL TOPIC: EASTERN LITERATURE

F. This entire theological discussion is based on a misunderstanding of the difference between
   1. our position in Christ
   2. our striving to fulfill that position experientially in daily life
   3. the promise that victory will be ours one day!
   We are free from sin's penalty (justification) in Christ, yet we still struggle with its power (progressive sanctification) and one day we will be free of its presence (glorification). This book as a whole teaches the priority of admitting our sin and striving toward sinlessness.

G. Another option comes from John's literary dualism. He wrote in black and white categories (also found in Dead Sea Scrolls). For him one was in Christ and thereby righteous, or in Satan and thereby sinful. There was no third category. This serves as a "wake up call" to peripheral, cultural, part-time, funeral-only, Easter-only Christianity!

H. Some suggested references on this difficult subject:

1. For the seven traditional interpretations of this passage see "The Epistles of John" in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* by John R. W. Stott, published by Eerdman's (pp. 130-136).
2. For a good treatment on the position of Perfection see *Christian Theology*, Vol. II, p. 440ff by H. Orlon Willie, published by Beacon Hill Press.
3. For a good treatment on the doctrine of continuing sin in the life of the Christian see "Perfectionism" by B. B. Warfield published by The Presbyterian and Reformed Published Company.

WORD AND PHRASE STUDY

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:4-10

[4]Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness. [5]You know that He appeared in order to take away sins; and in Him there is no sin. [6]No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. [7]Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8]the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9]No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10]By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.

3:4

NASB "Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness"
NKJV "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness"
NRSV "Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness"
TEV "Whoever sins is guilty of breaking God's law"
NJB "Whoever sins, acts wickedly"

The PRONOUN "everyone" is fronted here and in 1 John 3:6. This context relates to all humanity!

This is a PREENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE and a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. It is significant these PRESENT TENSE VERBS emphasize habitual, ongoing, lifestyle action in contradistinction to the AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVES in 1 John 2:1-2. However, the theological problem of this passage (compare 1 John 1:7-10 with 3:6-9) cannot be fully solved by a VERB TENSE. It is solved by the historical setting of two types of Gnostic false teachers and the total context of the book.

Another distinctive of this passage is its use of the term "lawlessness." This speaks not of the breaking of a law (Moses Law or societal norms) as much as an attitude of rebellion. This same word is used to describe the Antichrist in 2 Thess. 2:3,7. It may be a fuller definition of sin (cf. John 9:41; Rom. 14:23; James 4:17; 1 John 5:17), the opposite of Christlikeness (cf. 1 John 3:5), not just violation of a rule or standard.

3:5 "He appeared" This is an AORIST PASSIVE INDICATIVE which speaks of Jesus' incarnation (cf. 1 John 3:8; 2 Tim. 1:10). The same VERB, *phaneroō*, is used twice in 1 John 3:2 of His Second Coming. He came first as savior (cf. Mark 10:45; John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:21), but He will return as Consummator! In his commentary *The Letters of John*, one of my favorite teachers, Bill Hendricks says:

> "Two of the most penetrating statements of the purpose of Christ's coming are found in this verse and in verse 8. He was sent by God to take away sins (3:5), and he was revealed to destroy the devil's works (3:8). Elsewhere Luke recorded that Jesus' purpose in coming was to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). The Gospel of John states that Jesus came that his sheep might have the abundant life (John 10:10). Matthew implied the purpose of Jesus' coming in his interpretation of the name Jesus; He shall save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). The basic fact in all of these expressions is that Jesus Christ has done something for man which man could not do for himself" (pp. 79-80).

SPECIAL TOPIC: NT TERMS FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

▣ **"to take away sins"** This is an AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE. The action is contingent on human response (i.e., repentance and faith). The background of this statement is related to two possible sources.

1. the Day of Atonement (cf. Leviticus 16) where one of the two scapegoats symbolically bore away the sin from the camp of Israel (cf. John the Baptist's use in John 1:29)
2. a reference to what Jesus did on the cross (cf. Isa. 53:11-12; John 1:29; Heb. 9:28; 1 Pet. 2:24)

▣ **"and in Him there is no sin"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. Jesus Christ's sinlessness (cf. John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15; 7:26; 1 Pet. 1:19; 2:22) is the basis for His vicarious, substitutionary atonement on our behalf (Isaiah 53; Mark 10:45).

Notice that "sin" is PLURAL in the first part of 1 John 3:5 and SINGULAR in the last part. The first refers to acts of sin, the second to His righteous character. The goal is that believers will share both the positional sanctification and progressive sanctification of Christ. Sin is an alien thing for Christ and His followers.

SPECIAL TOPIC: SANCTIFICATION

3:6 "No one who abides in Him sins" Like 1 John 3:4, this is another PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE and PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. This passage must be contrasted with 1:8-2:2 and 5:16.

SPECIAL TOPIC: "ABIDING" IN JOHN'S WRITINGS

▣ **"no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him"** This verse has one PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE followed by two PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVES. Continual flagrant sinning reveals that one does not know Christ and has never known Christ. Sinning Christians

1. thwart Christ's mission
2. thwart the goal of Christlikeness
3. reveal the individual's spiritual origin (cf. John 8:44)

SPECIAL TOPIC: KNOW

3:7 "make sure no one deceives you" This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE with the NEGATIVE PARTICLE, which usually means stop an act in process. The presence of false teachers (cf. 1 John 2:26) sets the historical situation for a proper theological understanding of 1 John as a whole and 1 John 1:7-10 and 3:4-10 in particular.

▣ **"the one who practices righteousness is righteous"** This verse cannot be isolated from the general context and be used to advocate or condemn a doctrinal position ("works righteousness"). The NT is clear that human beings cannot approach the Holy God by their personal merit. Humans are not saved by self-effort. However, humans must respond to God's offer of salvation in the finished work of Christ. Our efforts do not bring us to God. They do show that we have met Him.

They clearly reveal our spiritual condition (cf. Rev. 22:11) and maturity after salvation. We are not saved "by" good works, but "unto" good works. The goal of God's free gift in Christ is Christlike followers (cf. Eph.2:8-9,10). The ultimate will of God for every believer is not just heaven when he dies (forensic justification), but Christlikeness (temporal sanctification) now (cf. Matt. 5:48; Rom. 8:28-29; Gal. 4:19)!

SPECIAL TOPIC: RIGHTEOUSNESS

3:8 "the one who practices sin is of the devil" This is the PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE. God's children are known by how they live, as are Satan's children (cf. 1 John 3:10; Matt. 7:13; Eph. 2:1-3).

SPECIAL TOPIC: DEVIL

▣ **"for the devil has sinned from the beginning"** This is PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. The devil continues to sin from the beginning (cf. John 8:44). Does this refer to creation or an angelic rebellion?

It is difficult theologically to determine when Satan rebelled against God. Job 1-2; Zechariah 3 and 1 Kings 22:19-23 seem to show that Satan is a servant of God and one of the angelic servants. It is possible (but not probable) that the pride, arrogance, and ambition of the eastern kings (of Babylon, Isa. 14:13-14 or of Tyre, Ezek. 28:12-16) are used to declare the rebellion of Satan (apparently a covering cherub, Ezek. 28:14,16). However, in Luke 10:18 Jesus said He saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning, but it does not tell us exactly when. In Rev. 12:3-4 there is an allusion to an angelic conflict in heaven with one third of the angels cast out of heaven. The origin and development of evil must remain an uncertainty because of the lack of revelation. Be careful of systematizing and dogmatizing isolated, ambiguous, figurative texts! The best discussion of the OT's development of Satan from servant to vile enemy is A. B. Davidson's *Old Testament Theology*, published by T & T Clark, pp. 300-306.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSONAL EVIL

SPECIAL TOPIC: WAR IN HEAVEN

▣ **"the Son of God"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: THE SON OF GOD

▣ **"appeared"** This is the Greek term *phaneroō,* which means "to bring to light so as to make clear." 1 John 3:5 and 8 are parallel and both use the term in the PASSIVE VOICE, which speaks of Christ being truly revealed in His incarnation (cf. 1 John 1:2). The problem with false teachers was not that the gospel was unclear to them, but that they had their own theological/philosophical agenda.

SPECIAL TOPIC: NT TERMS FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

▣ **"to destroy the works of the devil"** The purpose of Jesus' manifestation in time and flesh was to "destroy" (AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE of *luō*), which means "to loose," "to unbind," or "to destroy." Jesus did just that on Calvary, but humans must respond to His finished work and free gift (cf. Rom. 3:24; 6:23; Eph. 2:8) by receiving Him by faith (cf. John 1:12; 3:16).

The "already and not yet" tension of the NT also relates to the destruction of evil. The devil has been defeated, but he is still active in the world until the full consummation of the Kingdom of God.

3:9 "no one who is born of God" This is a PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPLE (cf. the parallel in 1 John 3:9c; 2:29; and 5:18) which speaks of a settled condition produced by an outside agent (God).

SPECIAL TOPIC: BORN AGAIN

▣ **"practices sin"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE in contradistinction to 1 John 2:1, where the AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE is used twice. There are two theories about the significance of this statement.

1. it relates to the Gnostic false teachers, especially that faction that reduced salvation to intellectual concepts, thereby removing the necessity of a moral lifestyle
2. the PRESENT TENSE VERB emphasizes continual, habitual, sinful activity (cf. Rom. 6:1), not isolated acts of sins (cf. Rom. 6:15)

This theological distinction is illustrated in Romans 6 (potential sinlessness in Christ) and Romans 7 (the ongoing struggle of the believer sinning less).

The historical approach #1 seems best, but one is still left with the need to apply this truth to today, which #2 addresses. There is a good discussion of this difficult verse in *Hard Sayings of the Bible* by Walter Kaiser, Peter Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred Brauch, pp. 736-739.

▣ **"because His seed abides in him"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. There have been several theories as to exactly what the Greek phrase, "His seed," means

1. Augustine and Luther said it refers to God's Word (cf. Luke 8:11; John 5:38; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23)
2. Calvin said it refers to the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5,6,8; 1 John 3:24; 4:4,13)
3. others said it refers to the Divine Nature or new self (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4; Eph. 4:24)
4. possibly it refers to Christ Himself as the "seed of Abraham" (cf. Luke 1:55; John 8:33,37; Gal. 3:16)
5. some say it is synonymous with the phrase "born of God"
6. apparently this was a term used by the Gnostics to speak of the divine spark in all humans

Number 4 is probably the best contextual option of all of these theories, but remember, John chose his vocabulary to refute the incipient Gnostics within the Christian community (i.e., #6).

3:10 This is a summary of 1 John 3:4-9. It contains two PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVES and two PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLES, which refer to action in process. Theologically this is parallel to Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 7:16-20). How one lives reveals one's heart, one's spiritual orientation.

This is the negative counterpoint to 1 John 2:29!

▣ **"children of God. . .children of the devil"** This shows John's Semitic background. Hebrew, being an ancient language with few ADJECTIVES, used "son of. . ." as an idiom to describe persons.

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHILDREN OF GOD

SPECIAL TOPIC: "SONS OF. . ."

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:11-12

[11]For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; [12]not as Cain, *who* was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

3:11 "the message" This Greek term *aggelia* is used only in 1 John 1:5 and 3:11. The first usage seems to be doctrinal, while the second is ethical. This is in keeping with John's balance between these two aspects of Christianity (cf. 1 John 1:8,10; 2:20,24; 3:14).

SPECIAL TOPIC: *KERYGMA* OF THE EARLY CHURCH

▣ **"you have heard from the beginning"** This phrase is a literary device which relates to Jesus as both the living Word of God (cf. John 1:1) and revealing the Word of God (cf. 1 John 1:1; 2:7,13,14,24; 2 John 5,6).

"The beginning" refers to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Special Topic: *ARCHĒ*

▣ **"we should love one another"** This often repeated theme is evidence by which believers know they are truly redeemed (cf. 1 John 3:10,14). It reflects Jesus' words (cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12,17; 1 John 3:23; 4:7-8,11-12,19-21).

3:12 "Cain" The account of Cain's life is recorded in Genesis 4. The exact reference is Gen. 4:4 (cf. Heb. 11:4), where the offerings of Cain and Abel are contrasted. Cain's actions reveal the influence of the fall of mankind (cf. Gen. 4:7; 6:5,11-12,13b). In both Jewish and Christian traditions (cf. Heb. 11:4; Jude 11) Cain is an example of wicked rebellion.

▣ **"*who* was of the evil one"** This grammatical construction could be MASCULINE SINGULAR (the evil one, cf. 1 John 3:10) or NEUTER SINGULAR (of evil). This same grammatical ambiguity is found in Matt. 5:37; 6:13; 13:19,38; John 17:15; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 John 2:13,14; 3:12; and 5:18-19. In several cases the context obviously refers to Satan (cf. Matt. 5:37; 13:38; John 17:15).

SPECIAL TOPIC: SATAN

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:13-22

[13]Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. [14]We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. [15]Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. [16]We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. [17]But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? [18]Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. [19]We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him [20]in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. [21]Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; [22]and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

3:13 "Do not be surprised" This is a PRESENT ACTIVE IMPERATIVE with a NEGATIVE PARTICLE which often means to stop an act already in progress (cf. 1 Pet. 4:12-16). This is not a fair world; this is not the world that God intended it to be!

▣ **" if"** This is a FIRST CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE which is assumed to be true from the author's perspective or for his literary purposes.

▣ **"the world hates you"** It hated Jesus; it will hate His followers. This is a common theme in the NT (cf. John 15:18; 17:14; Matt. 5:10-11; 2 Tim. 3:12) and another evidence that one is a believer.

3:14 "We know" This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE (*oida* has PERFECT form, but PRESENT meaning). This is another common theme. God's children's confidence is related to (1) a change of

mind and (2) a change of action, which are the root meanings of the term "repent" in Greek and Hebrew.

▣ **"we have passed out of death into life"** This is another PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE (cf. John 5:24). One of the evidences of passing from death into life (i.e., Christian assurance is that we love one another. The other contextual evidence is that the world hates us (v. 13).

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE

▣ **"because we love the brethren"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. Love is the major characteristic of the family of God (cf. John 13:34-35; 15:12,17; 2 John 5; 1 Cor. 13; Gal. 5:22) because it is characteristic of God, Himself (cf. 1 John 4:7-21). Love is not the basis of human relationship with God, but the result. Love is not the basis of salvation, but another evidence of it.

▣ **"He who does not love abides in death"** This is a PRESENT PARTICIPLE used as the SUBJECT with a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE VERB. As believers continue to abide in love, unbelievers abide in hate. Hate, like love, is an evidence of one's spiritual orientation. Remember John's stark, dualistic categories; one abides in love or abides in death. No middle ground.

3:15 "Everyone" John has used this term (*pas*) 8 times since 1 John 2:29. The significance of this is that there are no exceptions to what John is saying. There are only two kinds of people, lovers and haters. John sees life in black or white terms, no pastels.

▣ **"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer"** This is a PRESENT ACTIVE PARTICIPLE (i.e., an ongoing, settled hatred). Sin occurs first in the thought life. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that hatred equals murder, as lust equals adultery (cf. Matt. 5:21-22).

▣ **"and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him"** This is not saying someone who commits murder cannot be a Christian. Sin is forgivable, but lifestyle actions reveal the heart. It is saying that one who habitually hates cannot be a Christian. Love and hate are mutually exclusive! Hate takes a life, but love gives its life.

SPECIAL TOPIC: MURDER

3:16 "We know" This is a PERFECT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. The Greek term used in 1 John 3:15 was *oida;* here *it is ginōskō*. These are used synonymously in John's writings.

▣ **"love by this"** Jesus has shown the ultimate example of what love is like. Believers are to emulate His example (cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15).

▣ **"He laid down His life for us"** This is an AORIST TENSE referring to Calvary using Jesus' own words (cf. John 10:11,15,17,18; 15:13).

▣ **"we ought"** Believers are bound by Jesus' example (cf. 1 John 2:6; 4:11).

▣ **"to lay down our lives for the brethren"** Christ is the example (cf. 1 John 1:7). As He laid down His life for others, Christians are to lay down their lives if necessary for the brethren. Death to self-centeredness is

1. a reverse of the Fall
2. the restoration of the image of God
3. living for the corporate good (cf. 1 Cor. 12:7; 2 Cor. 5:14-15; Phil. 2:5-11; Gal. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:21)

3:17 "But whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need" These are PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE VERBS. Laying down one's life in 1 John 3:16 is now put into the realm of potential,

practical help of one's brother. These verses sound so much like James (cf. James 2:15,16).

▣ **"and closes his heart against him"** This is an AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE. The term heart is literally "bowels," a Hebrew idiom for the emotions. Again, our actions reveal our Father.

SPECIAL TOPIC: HEART

▣ **"the love of God"** Again is this an OBJECTIVE or SUBJUNCTIVE GENITIVE or purposeful ambiguity?

1. love for God
2. God's love for us
3. both

Number 3 fits John's writings!

3:18 "let us not love with word or with tongue" Actions speak louder than words (cf. Matt. 7:24; James 1:22-25; 2:14-26).

▣ **"but in deed and truth"** The term "truth" is surprising. One would expect a synonym of "deed," like "action." The term seems to mean genuine (NJB) or true (TEV), like the use of "message" in 1 John 1:5 and 3:11, which emphasizes both doctrine and lifestyle, so too, "truth." The deed and motives must both be motivated by self-giving love (God's love) and not just be showy deeds that feed the ego of the provider or giver.

3:19 "We will know by this" This refers to the loving acts previously mentioned. This is a FUTURE MIDDLE (deponent) INDICATIVE, which is another evidence of one's true conversion.

▣ **"that we are of the truth"** Believers' loving lifestyles show two things: (1) that they are on the side of truth and (2) that their consciences are clear.

SPECIAL TOPIC: "TRUTH" (the concept) IN JOHN'S WRITINGS

3:19-20 There is much confusion about how to translate the Greek text of these two verses. One possible interpretation emphasizes God's judgment, while the other emphasizes God's compassion. Because of the context, the second option seems most appropriate.

3:20-21 Both of these verses are THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCES.

3:20	
NASB	**"in whatever our heart condemns us"**
NKJV, Peshitta	**"for if our heart condemns us"**
NRSV	**"whenever our hearts condemn us"**
TEV	**"if our conscience condemns us"**
NJB	**"even if our own feelings condemn us"**
REB	**"where conscience condemns us"**

All believers have experienced inner grief over not living up to the "standard" that they know is God's will for their lives (i.e., Romans 7). Those pains of conscience can be from God's Spirit (to cause repentance) or Satan (to cause self-destruction or loss of witness). There is both appropriate guilt and inappropriate guilt. Believers know the difference by reading God' book (or hearing His messengers). John is trying to console believers who are living by the standard of love but still struggling with sin (both commission and omission).

SPECIAL TOPIC: HEART

▣ **"and knows all things"** God knows our true motives (cf. 1 Sam. 2:3; 16:7; 1 Kgs. 8:39; 1 Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 6:30; Ps. 7:9; 44:21; Pro. 15:11; 20:27; 21:2; Jer. 11:20; 17:9-10; 20:12; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24; 15:8; Rom. 8:26,27).

3:21 "if our heart does not condemn us" This is a THIRD CLASS CONDITIONAL SENTENCE. Christians still struggle with sin and self (cf. Eph. 4:14; 6:10-18; 1 John 2:1; 5:16-17). They still face temptations and act inappropriately in specific situations. Often their conscience condemns them. As the hymn "At Even, Ere the Sun Was Set," by Henry Twells states:

"And none, O Lord, has perfect rest,
For none is wholly free from sin;
And they who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within."

A knowledge of the gospel, a sweet fellowship with Jesus, a yieldedness to the Spirit's leading and the Father's omniscience calm our hearts of dust (cf. Ps. 103:8-14)!

▣ **"we have confidence before God"** This speaks of open and free access to God's presence. It is an oft-repeated term and concept of John (cf. 1 John 2:28; 3:21; 4:17; 5:14; Heb. 3:6; 10:35. This phrase introduces two of the benefits of assurance.

1. that believers have perfect confidence before God
2. they obtain from Him whatever they ask

SPECIAL TOPIC: BOLDNESS

SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRISTIAN ASSURANCE

3:22 "whatever we ask we receive from Him" This is a PRESENT ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE and a PRESENT ACTIVE INDICATIVE. This reflects Jesus' statements in Matt. 7:7; 18:19, John 9:31; 14:13-14; 15:7,16; 16:23; Mark 11:24; Luke 11:9-10. These Scripture promises are so different from believer's experience in prayer. This verse seems to promise unlimited answered prayer. This is where a comparison of other relevant texts helps bring a theological balance. See the Special Topics below.

SPECIAL TOPIC: PRAYER, UNLIMITED YET LIMITED

SPECIAL TOPIC: EFFECTIVE PRAYER

▣ **"because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight"** Notice in this context the two requirements for answered prayer.

1. obedience
2. practicing the things pleasing to God (cf. John 8:29)

1 John is a "how to" book on effective Christian living and ministry.

SPECIAL TOPIC: KEEP

SPECIAL TOPIC: "COMMANDMENT" IN JOHN'S WRITINGS

NASB (UPDATED) TEXT: 1 JOHN 3:23-24

[23]This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. [24]The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

3:23 "This is His commandment. . .that we believe. . .and love" Notice the term "commandment" is SINGULAR with two aspects. The first aspect is personal faith; the VERB, "believe," is AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE (cf. John 6:29,40). The second aspect is ethical; the VERB, love, is in the PRESENT ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVE (cf. 1 John 3:11; 4:7). The gospel is a message to be believed, a person to receive, and a lifestyle to live!

▣ **"that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ"** The concept of "believe" is crucial in understanding biblical faith. The OT term *aman* reflected "loyalty," "trustworthiness," "dependability," or "faithfulness."

In the NT the Greek term (*pisteuō*) is translated by three different English terms: believe, faith, or trust. The term does not so much reflect on the Christian's trustworthiness as on God's trustworthiness! It is His character, revelation, and promises, not the loyalty or faithfulness of fallen humans, even redeemed fallen humans, that form the unshakable foundation!

The concept of believing in "the name" or praying "in the name" reflects the Near Eastern understanding that the name represents the person.

1. Jesus in Matt. 1:21,23,25; 7:22; 10:22; 12:21; 18:5,20; 19:29; 24:5,9; John 1:12; 2:23; 3:18; 14:26; 15:21; 17:6; 20:31
2. the Father in Matt. 6:9; 21:9; 23:39; John 5:43; 10:25; 12:13; 17:12
3. the Trinity in Matt. 28:19

Just a brief technical note on this verse. In his *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (p. 228), A. T. Robertson mentions a Greek manuscript problem relating to the VERB "believe." The Greek uncial manuscripts B, K, and L have AORIST ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVES, while ℵ, A, and C have PRESENT ACTIVE SUBJUNCTIVES. Both fit the context and style of John.

SPECIAL TOPIC: BELIEVE, TRUST, FAITH AND FAITHFULNESS IN THE OT

SPECIAL TOPIC: JOHN'S USE OF THE VERB "BELIEVE"

▣ **"Jesus Christ"** See SPECIAL TOPIC: CHRIST JESUS AS LORD

3:24 "The one who keeps. . .abides. . ." These are both PRESENT TENSE. Obedience is linked to abiding. Love is evidence that we are in God and God is in us (cf. 1 John 4:12,15-16; John 14:23; 15:10).

SPECIAL TOPIC: KEEP

▣ **"by the Spirit whom He has given us"** John uses certain evidences to evaluate true believers (cf. Rom. 4:13; 8:14-16, see Contextual Insights to 2:3-27, C). Two are related to the Holy Spirit.

1. confessing Jesus (cf. Rom. 10:9-13; 1 Cor. 12:3)
2. Christlike living (cf. John 15; Gal. 5:22; James 2:14-26)

SPECIAL TOPIC: PERSONHOOD OF THE SPIRIT

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This is a study guide commentary, which means that you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible. Each of us must walk in the light we have. You, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit are priority in interpretation. You must not relinquish this to a commentator.

These discussion questions are provided to help you think through the major issues of this section of the book. They are meant to be thought-provoking, not definitive.

1. What is the unifying theme of 1 John 3:11-24? (cf. 1 John 2:7-11)?
2. Explain the relationship of 1 John 3:16 and 17. How is laying down our lives to be compared with helping our brother in need?

3. Does 1 John 3:19-20 emphasize the strictness of God's judgment or God's great compassion which calms our fears?
4. How do we relate John's statement about prayer in 1 John 3:22 to our daily experience?
5. How does one reconcile John's seemingly paradoxical emphasis on the Christian's need to admit and confess sin and his statement of sinless perfection?
6. Why is John making such a heavy emphasis on lifestyle?
7. Explain the theological truths involved in being "born again."
8. How does this passage relate to the daily Christian life?

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